

Creating Cooperative Communities

1. Cooperative Cooking

Start a cooperative cooking group with a few friends, and save money, save time, and commit to buying greener foods. In cooperative cooking, each member cooks a meal that will feed all the families of the group (obviously, the group can't be too large, depending on the size of the families). You package it up for the other families and refrigerate. The next day, you make the exchange, getting enough food to feed your family different meals ... and with leftovers, it can mean no additional cooking for the rest of the week.

Cooperative cooking saves you money, because you can buy in bulk and are only buying the items you need for that one meal. It also helps you avoid the temptation of fast foods or going out to eat too often, because it adds variety to your menu.

Best of all, cooperative cooking lets you share traditional or special meals with friends and saves you time during the week that you can spend enjoying your family!

2. Carpool for the Environment

Share your ride to work, school, shopping, and other travel to save money and reduce the amount of pollution going into the local and global environment. Sharing a ride can often be a great way to build friendships, and it also means you have to drive less often. If you don't have someone in mind, check out the South Florida Ride Share program sponsored by the Florida Department of Transportation by visiting <http://www.1800234ride.com/>.

3. Community Gardening

Consider planting a small garden as part of your home's landscape. Keep it close to the house for ease, and start with herbs and your favorite fruit or vegetable. You'll be surprised how fun it is and the savings you'll gain from growing it yourself.

You can also start a community garden that's shared with your neighbors. The St. Lucie County Cooperative Extension Service has a community garden that you can visit and see how it's done. They may also be able to team you up with a Master Gardener to give you some tips to be successful. Visit <http://stlucie.ifas.ufl.edu/> or call (772) 462-1660.

Don't forget, if having your own garden doesn't interest you, then visit the Farmer's Market and purchase locally grown fruits and vegetables. You'll reduce your food's travel distance and invest in a local business!

4. The Great Exchange

Engaged, connected communities help people get through tough times. Get to know your neighbors and start planning ways you may be able to help each other. Plan a neighborhood garage sale where you can have a clothing or furniture swap. Who knows, you could create a whole new look for your living room without spending a dime!

Home improvements can go a lot faster if you can create a work group that takes turns working on each other's homes. Take an inventory of the skills your neighbors or friends possess and come up with a plan on which project to start. Be sure to use toxic-free products for your renovations.

Go beyond home improvements by swapping your time and expertise. For example, you may have no idea how to do home repairs, but are an excellent cook, or great with computers, or perhaps you can teach music or yoga or mentor a child. You don't even have to have a great skill. For example, you can run errands for someone in need.